

REMARKS

Claims 1, 6, 7, 12, 17, 18, and 23 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(e) as being anticipated by United States Patent No. 6,580,960 (Nicholson). Claims 2 and 13 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being obvious over Nicholson in view of United States Patent No. 5,886,909 (Milor). Claims 3-5, 9-11, 14-16, and 19-22 were determined to be allowable if rewritten independent form.

Applicants seek to clarify the status of claim 8. Claim 8 is not in the list of allowable claims in paragraph 5. However, Claim 8 is not mentioned under the prior art rejection sections (paragraphs 1-4). Moreover, claim 8 is indicated as being allowable on the Office Action Summary and reasons for allowability are given in paragraph 7. For purposes of this response, Applicants assume claim 8 is allowable.

The specification was amended to clarify that the tools 30-80 may be metrology tools or processing tools. Claims 8-11 were amended to correct a typographical error. Allowable claims 3, 8, 14, and 19 were rewritten in independent form. Claims 24-31, which depend from previously allowed claims, were added. The language "each of" was removed from claims 1, 3, 8, 12, 14, 19, and 23, recognizing that data may not be stored for "each of" the manufactured items in the process flow. For example, data may be stored on a sampling basis or by lot. This change does not affect the reasons for allowability indicated by the Office Action.

Independent Claims 1, 12, and 23, as amended, include the general features of identifying manufactured items associated with a process drift, generating a plurality of characteristic threads based on the production environment data, at least one of the characteristic threads being associated with other than processing tools used in the process flow, comparing the characteristic threads for at least those manufactured items associated with the process drift, and determining at

least one potential cause for the process drift based on the comparison of the characteristic threads.

Nicholson and Milor fail to teach or suggest generating characteristic threads not associated with processing tools. Accordingly, claims 1, 12, 23, and all claims depending therefrom, are allowable. Applicants respectfully request that these claims be allowed.

In view of the remarks set forth herein, the application is believed to be in condition for allowance and notice to that effect is solicited. Nonetheless, should any issues remain that might be subject to resolution through a telephonic interview, the Examiner is invited to contact the undersigned attorney at (608) 833-0748 with any questions, comments or suggestions relating to the referenced patent application.

Respectfully submitted,

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